

Preface-ish/ Intermission

Carpet burn on my knees, crawling, begging you to thumb these pages to the next page break and skip to Chapter 1.

If it were up to me or Gale, the back of the book and prologue, or whatever this is, would be blank. Or maybe a giant, playful middle finger. Laconic, precise, informative.

But the green-eyed would never allow it.

It's just every single trailer I've watched, every back of the book or introduction I've ever read, ruined everything. It cheats the imagination and pickpockets the consumers, robbing them of one of the most rewarding parts of a story—discovery. What is it? Where is it going? Are we talkin' elves, a love story, an outer space elephant ballad? Strap yourself to the first intended word, and there's no saying where you will blast off to. Or, succumb to a marketable punchline, skip the journey, teleport to the answer, and be left wasted on unfulfillment.

Despite my efforts, this little intro is likely no remedy to my complaints.

So I urge you, save it for the end or middle. Think of it more as an intermission for when you want a little more context. Keep it, because I think it is important, for when you're curious to know how I came to write this, and my relationship to Gale.

She fell.

Guess you didn't listen. Have fun blowing bubbles.

I watched the decaying of the half-eaten apple on my counter top. I looked over at Gale, her blue eyes howling at me from across the table, waiting, begging me to understand. Her blonde hair dancing in front of her face, she looked at me like she was my resuscitator.

I leafed through the words. I touched my hand to my chest. But I found myself right where I thought I was—sitting in my kitchen at 11:00 AM on a Tuesday. Gale's intense, desperate stare made me think I might be hanging off the edge of a cliff, though it made me think my comprehension was my hand gripping the last bit of earth that could save me. Her glare shot volts into me, shaking me like a defibrillator. I saw the pleading bubbling up in her pupils, 'Breathe! Breathe you idiot, don't die!'

I responded with a confused squint, 'But Gale. We're sitting in my kitchen at 11:00 AM on a Tuesday . . . look at me. I'm not dying.'

Oblivious to silent cues, she kept watching me fall. So I bailed. I caved. I reassured her of my understanding with some nods and 'yeah yeahs'. The day just felt too mundane for a near-death experience.

I can't even remember what she was talking about. Something about a Honda Scrambler, I think? Riding it barefoot, maybe. Whatever it was, it didn't match the tempo of her urgency. It happened a lot. While she talked about spaghetti red jumpsuits, after a while, you learn to dodge the severity.

Maybe it was about the plexiglass ramp. *What* I don't think is important. The place she was trying to take me, the apple, the sensation of what she was saying is what breathes.

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It's been a while now since I've heard one of her maniacal stories in my kitchen. I think about it all the time, though. It's hard not to. The pieces of her life are everywhere, unavoidable. Every day when I put on my shoes and see the Vans logo, when I crave a Cajun fish taco from Wahoos, when I hear the Beach Boys, when Tony Hawk tweets hilarious interactions about his aging fame; every time my mom paddles out with me, starts a food fight or passes a flask while our asses freeze to a ski-lift, behind every sip of beer, in the drugs I consume, Gale's Webb of influence surrounds me, surrounds all of us.

Where the pieces fit, the surround, well, that's what I've been trying to hammer fist together.

It's challenging since Gale shot her stories out to me like confetti in little boundless colorful anecdotes; she exploded them in my face.

"Have you seen my coffee?"

"Joey! Joey, I have to tell you. Please don't . . . oh my gosh. Okay, don't tell anyone. Palos Verdes. This cop, bad, BAD cop. We put a chain around his axle . . ."

I never found the coffee. Instead, I am left scrambling to collect all the vibrant strands of her life, un-cafeinated. Trying to pick them up is tedious. Covered in the spit and sweat from her grimace, they've grown soggy. Some of the anecdotes tear and fray when I pull on them. As delicate as I try to be, the prying and prodding attenuates the minutiae of her stories. The coughs and snuffles of the room, what part of the sky the clouds hung in, all the small talk, eroded with time.

Which is right to the tune of Gale. Whether she hates it or she's incapable of it, she simply doesn't do small talk.

“Oh, wild. Do you remember what that night was like? Was it cold, overcast, did the chain feel icy in your hands?”

The fluff itched Gale. She’d look at me accusingly like I was an FBI investigator. She had a hard time understanding why somebody would possibly want to know such inconsequential details and why they weren't more interested in the sparks flying off the chain.

I guess I agree. The sum of it all, Gale’s life, what it equates to, the goop left from her charred bouquet, that is what is important. It’s the stain that lasts. Everything else is just to help absorb.

I’m not entirely sure how it’s fallen to me. A lifetime of wisdom, lessons hard-earned, casually slid over across my kitchen table and into my dingy hands. It’s humbling to have somebody share with me all the intimacies of their life, especially one so profound. I feel like I’ve been handed a degree without ever spending a day in class. I’ve spent a large portion of my adult life living out of a car, just trying to rip. It hardly seems warranted. Maybe Gale found trust in my restless eyes. In all my paranoid looks over my shoulder, in my leg taps, in my passion for the useless, she found a confidant. The riddle of the world handed over to a bum, a hack.

I’ve spent quite a lot of time staring, not doing much with it. I don’t know. Some legends live fuller through the arcane word of mouth, crafted by old raconteurs. They’re built during the intermission—when the snow melts off the mountain, when a puddle soaks at the bottom of a ramp, when there’s no swell, and a creative tongue rescues the painfully inert with the story of a mystic legend. All the rippers listen carefully, sucking onto every drop of escape. Their arms and legs start pushing, carving, like a dreaming puppy, and for a blip, everyone is saved from the lull. (If that sounds like jargon to you, don’t be scared away. This story is for everyone. It’s just a friendly wave to those, like me, who’ve been affected by Gale’s ‘Galeness’).

It's how I first got to know Gale. Not when I saw her at Vans skatepark, or at one of her shows, or when she walked in through our front door, it was through the lulls when my mom would tell me about her. On a car ride home, coming back from a dreary grocery trip—words woven over the rumble of our worn-out minivan—that's how I got to know Gale. She lived louder in my head. A selfish part of me wanted it to stay like that.

But then I think about how many lives would go untouched and all the people who would continue on living in moderation. The ones who wake up on Saturday mornings after sleeping in and after sinking into the slow morning they're not sure why, but a steady uneasiness festers and interrupts their expected relaxation. Fidgeting in their comfort, they take a look at their mind's resume and check the boxes and wait for the promised fulfillment and happiness to hit. When it doesn't come, they add more lines with more tasks and achievements, but still, Saturday after Saturday, an uneasiness nags them.

It would be hard for me to sleep at night knowing of their suffering with the anecdote in my head, knowing all they need is the earthquake of Gale to bust through their door, for her to make them think, in the comfort of their own home, they are dying.

I only wish everyone could climb on up, jump into my ear, and burrow into my mind to feel and see what I see. Beyond this crappy failed medium of words, I wish I could transfer the emotions and the exact image of my mind's eye while I sat listening to all of Gale's emphatic stories. I know, if executed, how many souls it can emancipate.

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I feel like I hold her whole life in my hand. Her legacy, her message, her reach can live or die in my palm. A huge responsibility for a hack. It's like holding onto the holocaust, the fountain of youth, and some bath salts. I can't just feed these ingredients out recklessly.

This is my 34th first chapterbackslashprefaceafterwritingawholechapterwithoutany spacesbecauseIthoughtitwouldgiveyouinsightonthemindofGaleWebbandhowshethoughtand movednonstopfastsuperfastuntilthewordsstarttoblisterwithfrictionandgravityntiltheyalldslveaprtnu reysmeltn2blssssncohrntpanlssslaannnddahhddddahhhhh.

I've contemplated how to deliver for an embarrassing amount of time; pacing my room, shorts pulled into a thong while wearing a plaid blazer, spitting on my own face while staring in the mirror, watching it drip down until it evaporated. It can only go on for so long.

I guess the only way to do it is to tell it like we're under the drumming of rain. When we're stuck to the confines of the inside, tightening some trucks, adding grip tape, waxing, lubing, waiting for life to speed up.

Picture me how you want. Maybe like Forrest Gump on the bench, except with a drunken slur and more tattoos. Or Morgan Freeman after he was kicked in the balls. Or the Jerk. A bum in a cold alley, propped up against some red bricks, covered in rags, ranting over a can of chili. Whatever makes my maudlin narration easier.

I'll be the voice for Gale's painful stuff in between, the periods, the commas, and spaces. Tying this generational life together, I'll be the coping, bearings, and chain lube, filling the fissures of my keyboard with road rash. The straps, the rails, the nails, I'll make this drop-in makeable.

Hi.